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JUSTICE DEPARTMENT HONORS UNDERCOVER GUN, DRUG INVESTIGATION WITH PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

WASHINGTON – A jointly run undercover investigation that led to dozens of arrests in the Washington area and the seizure of 123 firearms and \$1.5 million in narcotics was honored by the Department of Justice today as one of 24 national recipients of the annual Project Safe Neighborhoods Achievement Awards. The honor recognizes work performed by the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD), the FBI's Washington Field Office, the Washington Field Division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Columbia.

"The outstanding results from this joint investigation, which included taking 123 firearms off of the streets that were sold illegally, speaks for itself," said U.S. Attorney Ronald C. Machen Jr. "I am especially proud of the collaborative efforts of our MPD, FBI and ATF law enforcement partners in this case."

The award was given during a ceremony hosted by Acting Deputy Attorney General Gary G. Grindler at the Project Safe Neighborhoods program's national conference in New Orleans. Recipients were chosen from a large pool of nominations submitted by U.S. Attorneys' Offices across the nation.

The undercover operation was aimed at purchasing firearms and narcotics from individuals selling them in the Washington area. From July 2009 until December 2009, 123 firearms (pistols, shotguns, and 25 assault rifles) were purchased by undercover officers. The total value of the narcotics purchased and seized during follow-up search warrants exceeded \$1.5 million dollars worth of cocaine, crack cocaine and PCP. Agents and officers charged 48 people with violations of firearms and narcotics laws.

Each of the agencies involved in the investigation brought specialized expertise to the undercover work. Many of those arrested were convicted felons who purchased their guns in the illegal firearms market in Maryland and Virginia.

“Guns and narcotics are often a fatal combination,” said Shawn Henry, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the FBI’s Washington Field Office. “I’m proud that the hard work by these agents and officers resulted in safer homes for our families and safer streets for our children.”

Special Agent in Charge Edgar A. Domenech, of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, cited the teamwork shown by the agencies involved in the case. "I'm proud of the partnerships that we have in Washington D.C.," he said. "It's great to see the hard work that our agents and law enforcement partners do day in and day out recognized by the Department of Justice."

MPD Chief Cathy L. Lanier praised the efforts in planning and carrying out the investigation, saying, “I commend the members of the Major Narcotics Investigations Branch who came up with this creative strategy to get guns and drugs off our streets. This non-traditional approach to law enforcement is just one example of how we’re making our communities safer.”

The case was among four investigations honored at the Project Safe Neighborhoods conference with the Outstanding Gun Crime Investigation Award. Others were in Arizona, Georgia, and Missouri.

Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN) is a crime prevention initiative that combines traditional law enforcement activities with community-based support and intervention programs aimed at reducing and preventing violent crimes and helping past offenders to adjust and re-enter the community. Founded in 2001, Project Safe Neighborhoods is the nation's largest and most visible effort to combat violent crime and criminal gang activity at the community level. It helps to create safer communities through heightened coordination and cooperation among federal, state, and local law enforcement and the community. Originally focused on gun crime, PSN has expanded its focus to help address all forms of violent crime and gang activity by providing locally based programs with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

To find out about more about PSN and its local programs, visit the PSN website at www.psn.gov.

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